



Imperfect Recipes Vol. Taco

Let's give them something to taco 'bout



By Isaac Lai

*This one's for the
people that said I'd
never make it...and
Jerry Seinfeld.*

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3. Next Time on Imperfect Recipes...

Re-Introduction

Hi, my name is Isaac Anthony Lai and after 7 heartfelt requests (2 of which came from family members); I am back with another book.

Looking back at the last non-best seller, I realised there were so many things I could've done differently. Like write it well, proofread it more than once, take better photos or perhaps actually learn how to cook.

So for this edition...I did exactly none of that and decided to take a small non-existent fanbase and make my content even more niche by focusing on something I've been eating a lot of these past couple of years.

Tacos.

Why tacos you ask?

Well...there's just something about the simplicity of a taco. Your tortilla is a vessel that can make dreams come true or make your kids wish they were adopted by parents who knew how to cook.

So hopefully this book helps you with the former as opposed to leading you down a path where you're wistfully looking out the window of a retirement home wondering why little Jacob hasn't visited in 7 months.

Wow, that got dark-o. Let's get to the tacos.

Tacos



Central Pork



Central Pork

You'll belly believe how good it is

Prep Time
20 minutes

Cook Time
55 minutes

Total Time
75 minutes

Ingredients

- Pork Belly
- Salt
- Green Apple
- Pineapple
- Coriander
- Red Onions
- Lime juice
- Chilli flakes
- Avocado (always)

Method

1. Assuming you're the type of person that plans meals ahead, purchase your pork belly the night before you want tacos opposed to the day of (if it's already the day of, you're probably better off ordering some tacos off Uber Eats my guy).
2. Unwrap your pork belly from the plastic and place on a plate before putting it in the fridge uncovered. This is so the moisture on the skin is absorbed by the sneaky suction of your fridge.
3. Fast forward to next day after you brush your teeth, do your skincare routine and take your morning deuce, take your pork belly out of the fridge and start piercing the skin and create crevices.
4. Assault that pork belly. Oops, I meant salt that the skin generously and then add some oil too.
5. Stick that piece of swine into your airfryer at 200 degrees celsius for 30 minutes and watch one episode of Rick and Morty.
6. After you conclude that episode of hijinks and hilarity, start prepping your toppings. Slice up your green apple, pineapple, coriander and red onions as fine as possible and toss in some salt, pepper and lime juice.
7. Your airfryer should be beeping now but your pork isn't on point yet, cook it for another 20 minutes at 140 degrees celsius.
8. Grab one soft avocado (texturally soft, not one that cries when you say it looks like Shrek's swollen testicle) and scoop the flesh out and mash it with a mix of lime juice, salt, pepper and chilli flakes.
9. Your airfryer should be beeping you again (what a clingy child). Take it out and put it on a cooling rack skinside up (if you don't have one, put it in an elevated location so that the pork juices can drip out) and let it rest.
10. After your pork belly has taken a 10 minute nap, slice it up and start assembling your tacos (avocado and sauces first, some pork meat and crackling and top it with the salsa).

Katsup with you?



Katsup with you?

How’s work? How are the kids?

Prep Time
15 minutes

Cook Time
20 minutes

Total Time
35 minutes

Ingredients

- Chicken Thigh
- Salt
- Pepper
- Panko bread crumbs
- All Purpose Flour
- Eggs
- Cabbage
- Worcestershire Sauce
- Wasabi
- Kewpie Mayo

Method

1. Pick up some chicken breast when you’re in the grocery aisle and then hide it somewhere secretive. Save someone from lean chicken please.
2. Afterwards, go pick up some chicken thigh and give yourself a pat on the back and a nod of approval.
3. Season your chicken thighs with a generous amount of salt and pepper on both sides then tenderise (with a hammer/back of your knife not by whispering sweet nothings to your juicy thigh meat).
4. It’s coating time. First, coat your chicken thigh on the top, bottom and the sides in flour and shake off the excess. Do the same in your egg wash and then dunk it like you’re Jordan in Space Jam into the panko bread crumbs.
5. Place your chicken in the air fryer for 24 minutes at 200 degrees celsius and make sure you flip at the halfway point.
6. Whilst your chicken is being fried for your enjoyment, shred that cabbage like a topless waiter during bachelorette party season.
7. Put your crunchy water to the side, it’s time to make some wasabi mayo. I like a 3:2 mayo to wasabi ratio but adjust accordingly based on your fondness/tolerance for wasabi.
8. Once your chicken is ready, give the closest person a hi 5 because you’ve just knocked it out of the park. Slice up that piece of non-chicken breast and admire the steam rising off of that tender dark meat.
9. When assembling your taco, a teaspoon of wasabi mayo at the base, topped with some cabbage and some chicken with just a couple of drops of worcestershire sauce to top it off.

11 Herbs & Spices



11 Herbs & Spices

Yes, somebody did say KFC

Prep Time
5 minutes

Delivery Time
20 minutes

Total Time
25 minutes

Ingredients

- KFC
- Tomatoes
- Red Onion
- Coriander
- Lime Juice
- Avocado
- Supercharged Sauce

Method

1. Switch from TikTok over to a food delivery app that houses KFC (or potentially text some friends who might owe you a favour).
2. Ensure your order contains a few chicken thighs and/or popcorn chicken. Please don't get tenders, save your tender side for bedroom shenanigans. Oh and make sure you get the Supercharged dipping sauce, it's...super.
3. Go back to the couch/bed and twiddle your thumbs or maybe read a book until the estimated time of chicken arrival is at about five minutes.
4. Dice up your onion, coriander and tomato as fine as possible and season with salt, pepper and lime juice to taste
5. Grab a ripe avocado and scoop out the flesh then mash. Season with salt, pepper, lime juice and chili flakes. Serenade your guacamole with some Dua Lipa lyrics for a little extra flavour.
6. Tip your driver (or at least thank them enthusiastically). If your mate delivered, then ensure the next KFC/Macca's run is on you.
7. Shred those thighs like festival season is coming up.
8. Layer your taco with some supercharged sauce, guacamole, chicken and pico de gallo and enjoy.

What the Duck?



What the Duck?

Who’s that Peking through your window?

Prep Time
10 minutes

Delivery Time
20 minutes

Total Time
30 minutes

Ingredients

BBQ Duck

Hoisin Sauce

Cucumber

Spring Onion

Method

1. This is another recipe for those that want to duck out of using their stoves.
2. Pick up a whole BBQ duck from your local Chinese BBQ spot. Ensure that the place has the meat on hooks and on display via the window. You’re in the wrong spot if the meat isn’t in plain sight, too clean, the staff speak perfect English and if they accept anything other than cash.
3. Once home, take a deep breath. It’s time to showcase your knife skills (or lack thereof in my case).
4. Separate the skin from the meat or slice up as many pieces of duck as you think you’ll need (factors to take into account: amount of people present, how hungry you are, how motivated you are to keep working and how loud your Mum’s voice in your head is).
5. Cut up some cucumber and julienne some spring onion...or use scissors (factors to take into account: how much time you have are you trying to impress someone, did you know that julienne was spelled with the letter e instead of a)?
6. Time to assemble, a teaspoon of hoisin sauce, top with duck, spring onion and cucumber and silently mutter “duck yeah, this is delicious.”

Belle of the Ball



Belle of the Ball

*Not cloudy but always a chance
of meatballs*

Prep Time
10 minutes

Cook Time
20 minutes

Total Time
30 minutes

Ingredients

- Your favourite meatballs
- Canned tomatoes
- Garlic
- Onions
- Basil
- Jalapenos
- Mozzarella
- Pork crackling

Method

1. First step is to cook your meatballs about 75% of the way in some olive oil. I opted for a pork and veal combination but please go with whatever type of meatball you prefer (ideally one that didn't get an asterisk mark in the HSC).
2. Take your meatballs out and put them to the side (same place you put your hopes and dreams). Don't wipe out your pan, we want those sweet meat juices to influence our tomato sauce.
3. Cook some garlic and onions on your pan then add your canned tomatoes. Season with salt, pepper, sugar and bring to the boil. I threw in some jalapenos too because I'm a spice boy (how good are the Spice Girls btw)?
4. Once your sauce is boiled, adjust your heat to a simmer and dunk your meatballs into your tomato sauce and let them get to know each other for about 10 minutes.
5. Whilst your meatballs are getting saucy, chop up some jalapenos and take your packet pork crackling out and start snacking (but not to the point where you're ruining your main meal).
6. Apply a bit of cheese onto your simmering meatballs so you get a nice blanket of mozzarella on top.
7. ~~Avengers~~ Tacos assemble. A couple of meatballs, some jalapenos and some crackling and you're good to go. Also, scoop out some tomato sauce to use as a dip for an extra flavour punch.

What's Poppin'?



What’s Poppin’

Brand new tacos, just hop in

Prep Time
20 minutes

Cook Time
20 minutes

Total Time
40 minutes

Ingredients

- Chicken thighs
- Thai Basil
- Chinese 5 Spice
- Soy Sauce
- Garlic
- White Pepper
- Corn/tapioca starch
- Wasabi
- Spring onions
- Kewpie Mayonaise

Method

1. Get your chicken thighs and slice them up into 3cm pieces (this is Taiwanese popcorn chicken we’re making, not Taiwanese Gobstopper chicken).
2. After cutting, you’ve got to marinate your chicken for at least 20 minutes (bonus iFat points if you do it overnight). Place your chicken pieces in a ziplock bag with minced up garlic, soy sauce, Chinese 5 spice mix and Thai basil. Shake and stir it like a multiverse version of James Bond.
3. Whilst your chicken is marinating (I know you’re not marinating it overnight), julienne your spring onions....or just chop them up finely. You should also be pre-heating your air fryer for 7 minutes at 180 degrees.
4. Take your chicken out of the fridge and dip each piece in your starch and make sure you shake off the excess before placing in your air fryer basket.
5. Cook your chicken at 6 minutes on both sides at 200 degrees and then an additional 4 minutes at 160 (with some additional Thai basil in there so you get some crispy basil with your chicken).
6. Hopefully you still have some wasabi mayo from your killer take on my katsu tacos, if not, mix up a batch of wasabi mayo to taste (my ideal ratio is 2:1 mayo to wasabi but whatever you prefer).
7. Assemble your taco with a little wasabi mayo, at least 3 pieces of popcorn chicken and then as much spring onion as you want.
8. Serve with a side of additional popcorn chicken. Gotta have some veggies on the side you know?

Tazos



Tazos

A pizza me to you

Prep Time
5 minutes

Cook Time
5 minutes

Total Time
10 minutes

Ingredients

- Pineapple (yep)
- Capsicum
- Salami
- Red Onion
- BBQ Sauce
- Mozarella
- Tortillas

Method

1. I like pizza, and I like tacos. Porque no los dos?
2. Get a tortilla and add a teaspoon of your favourite pizza sauce (be it barbecue, tomato or perhaps alfredo).
3. Cheese is the next layer, rain on that tortilla with mozzarella like Lil Wayne with dollar bills at a strip club.
4. Now the toppings, there isn't a wrong answer here but there are answers that are better than others. I went with a Supreme style pizza with pineapple, capsicum, salami and red onion but you could go with whatever keeps your boat afloat.
5. Stick your tortizza/taxo/pico/pizzaco in the air fryer for 5 minutes at 180 degrees.
6. Take out of the air fryer and fold like its a taco and wonder why this isn't something Domino's/Pizza Hut have already added on their menus (I am very, very available if you're looking for a consultant).

Salmon Tos-ta-da!



Salmon Tos-Ta-Da!

The best fish taco in this book

Prep Time 5 minutes	Cook Time 5 minutes	Total Time 10 minutes
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Ingredients

- Sashimi-grade Salmon
- Sriracha
- Kewpie Mayo
- Spring onions
- Lime juice
- Avocado

Method

1. Slice up your salmon into bite sized cubes and throw it into a mixing bowl.
2. Put in equal parts sriracha and kewpie mayonnaise and a squirt of lime juice and mix thoroughly. That is literally it, even the spring onions are optional. You could totally throw this mix on top of some rice or have it as is and you’re in for a good time.
3. Take some tortillas and deep fry them. If you don’t have a deep fryer, fry the tortillas one at a time in a small saucepan and on a low heat.
4. Make sure they don’t puff up too much and flip regularly. Ensure you get that glossy golden brown look on the outside. I call this a taco tan.
5. Spread some avocado on the base of your freshly fried tostada and then top with your salmon mixture.
6. Bite into that bad boy and crunch as loudly as possible. The more obnoxious the better. Post a live video on your Instagram for maximum impact. Your friends will love it.

Braise you



Braise You

Thanks Mum!

Prep Time
5 minutes

Cook Time
180 minutes

Total Time
185 minutes

Ingredients

- A loving mother
- Tortillas
- Spring Onions

Method

1. My Mum doesn't know this but I've made a pact to myself to write her a little tribute every time I decide to write a book (or in this case, a poorly formatted PDF) in the future.
2. During one of my most recent visits, she made a murderer's row of my childhood favourites; including her famous braised beef brisket. It's deep in flavour, incredibly tender and very hard to make because of the combination of spices and aromatics. Oh and it also takes hours of hours to make properly.
3. Being my Mum, she made enough to feed the whole of Zamunda and gave it all to me in several tupperware boxes.
4. So, this is less a recipe but more of a shout out to Mama Lai for her never forgetting about the time where I thought the egg shell was a key ingredient in fried rice for texture, or the time as a 4 year old when I asked if I should put peanut butter on the bread before or after it went into the toaster or the time or countless other experiences where I displayed as much tactical nuance in the kitchen as Dominic Toretto does about sticking to speed limits.
5. Oh she also bought a 2KG jar of pickles to give to me just because.
6. The actual recipe? Visit your parents and ask them about all of the things that you don't know.
7. Thanks Mum.

Back to Cali



Back to Cali

Going, going, back, back to Cali

Prep Time
10 minutes

Cook Time
30 minutes

Total Time
40 minutes

Ingredients

Steak (rump or sirloin)

Fries

Wasabi

Kewpie Mayonaise

Tomatoes

Red Onion

Coriander

Lime juice

Avocado

Chicken Salt

Method

1. Take your steak out of the fridge and leave it alone (it’s just going through a phase) until it hits room temperature.
2. Season your steak with salt and pepper and apply oil onto the steak.
3. Get your pan piping hot, like dress it in the latest Victoria’s Secret lingerie or maybe pay for it to go to a nice day spa (you can also just preheat the stove).
4. Put the steak in the pan fat first and then get a nice sear on both sides (I like my steak medium rare...you’re going to have to take my word for it even though the photos indicate I’m more of a medium well kinda guy).
5. As your steak is cooking, throw some frozen fries into your air fryer and cook them for 16 minutes at 200 degrees (make sure you give the basket a shake at the halfway point).
6. Once your steak is done, let it rest for about ten minutes (it has been getting fried alive after all).
7. Chop your vegetables for your pico de galloand get your guacamole going and ensure your feet are tapping along to the rhythm of Stardust/Daft Punk’s ‘The Music Sounds Better With You.
8. Slice your steak according to the grain then go one more chop down the middle.
9. Take your fries out of the basket and liberally make it rain chicken salt on your golden brown potatoes.
9. It’s assembly time, whack some wasabi, mayonnaise and guac as your base before placing some steak, fries and pico on top.

What's Next?



Who knows?

Wow, you made it to the end of the book.

Thanks for reading every recipe line by line and giving every iteration of one of my favourite foods a red hot go (or maybe you just had a glance at the photos then stopped at the last page to see if Harry finally beat Voldemort).

I promise you (yes, you specifically because I'm 98% positive you're the only one that made it to this page) that I will write something else food-related again (oh and you bet your ass I'm working on the memoir that will eventually be adapted into a series where John Cho plays me).

Thanks to everyone that has been with me on this journey from the beginning when I pronounced tortilla with a hard L to now where I'm considering buying myself a tortilla press for Christmas.

Until next time!